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Chapter IX

Observations about the Music and the Folklore

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The love of the Guaraní for the art of music has been known since Jesuit times. The missionaries have made good use of it in the work of catechizing. On the other hand, the poverty of musical instruments integrated into the tribal culture, some of them simply rhythm markers, is surprising.

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The most important ones are the gourd rattle, or mbaraká, and the rhythm sticks, or takuá(pú), used in all the religious ceremonies. In the three subgroups of the tribe, the men mark time for the religious dances and prayers with the mbaraká, while the women accompany them with the takuapú. In only one village, in Itariri, did I participate in religious dances, directed by a Mbüá ñanderü who replaced the gourd mbaraká (or also mbaraká 1) with a guitar of industrial origin (yvyrá mbaraká or simply mbaraká), which is known in other villages only for playing secular music. The ñanderü referred to only struck the strings to mark the rhythm. The ceremonial use of the maraca by the men and of the rhythm stick by the women is one of the many signs of unity that link the Guaraní to Chaco cultures. It even seems that all the Guaraní musical instruments are found in the Chaco and farther west (1).

1. /The notes for Ch. IX are given on p. 160 in the original source./ The study by Nordenakiöld, 1919, pp. 164 to 183, is elucidative in this respect. Concerning the rhythm sticks, see Métraux, 1927 and 1928a, pp. 215-216.

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As an instrument characteristic of the Mbüá, the mbarimbáu, a monochord that consists of a bow measuring almost a meter in length, provided with a string made of four or five threads of line, merits mention; one of the ends is placed in the mouth; one blows with variable intensity and plays the string with the fingers. The bucal cavity itself acts as resonance box. An instrument also existing in the Chaco, as well as among the Patagonians and